

overall integrity of the site and areas surrounding it. For sites that merited recognition as SNHA's, natural communities and rare species were described using report formats developed by the NC NHP. SNHAs were ranked as national, regional, state, or county significant with criteria used by the NC NHP and The Nature Conservancy for statewide and global rarity for rare species and communities. The criteria used for site significance are:

National Significance: Considered to contain examples of natural communities, rare plant or animal populations, or other significant ecological features that are among the highest quality or best of their kind in the nation.

State Significance: Considered to contain examples of natural communities, rare plant or animal populations, or other significant ecological features that are among the highest quality occurrences in North Carolina after nationally significant examples. There may be comparable (or more significant) sites elsewhere in the nation or within the state.

Regional Significance: These sites contain communities or species that are represented elsewhere in the state by better quality examples, but which are among the outstanding examples in their geographic region of the state. Normally, the geographic region considered includes at least the counties immediately surrounding the county the site is located in.

County Significance: Sites that do not rank of regional significance, but which are significant biological resources at the county level. These may include sites with a good example of a fairly common community type, a species that is rare in the state but widespread in other parts of the nation or in neighboring states, or a site that has been greatly reduced from its original quality but which still has significance.

For various reasons, this inventory is not a complete record of all natural areas in Burke County. Although thousands of acres were identified as having potential as significant natural areas, they represent only a fraction of the county. Some areas with potential were not surveyed due to a lack of landowner permission. Land ownership patterns characterized by numerous small tracts, or poor condition of surrounding lands, precluded survey in other areas. It is almost certain that additional significant natural areas will be found over time as areas that were inaccessible become available for biological survey.